



# CPEC

## Presentation to the Joint Committee on Higher Education Master Plan

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Good morning, Chairman Ruskin and members of the committee. I'm Karen Humphrey, executive director of the California Postsecondary Education Commission. Thank you for what is already a great start in elevating this important issue to the level it deserves, and thank you for inviting us to speak.

As the planning and policy coordination agency designated in the Master Plan, CPEC is ready to support this work with our data, research and policy analysis. In my comments, I can largely agree with what has already been said this morning, in many instances very eloquently. I will try not to repeat those points but to add a few thoughts to them.

CPEC is and always has been committed to the vision of the Master Plan of equity and access for every Californian who can benefit from higher education.

We agree with those concerned that the issue is less what is in the Master Plan than the fact that California's commitment to higher education, especially public higher education, has deteriorated in recent years. This is both a fiscal and a policy issue.

In spite of the budget crisis, we think this is *exactly* the time to talk about the Master Plan—because this is when California most needs it. We support your call for a vigorous, open conversation involving all the citizens of California about it.

In my comments, I will primarily focus on public education; while the independent and private institutions are very valuable to the system as a whole, the policy issues before you are primarily those of public higher education. Here are some thoughts regarding your focus areas:

**Access and eligibility** are fundamental to the Master Plan—but access alone is not sufficient; we must do much better to assure the *success* of every student in achieving what they want from college in the first place.

We don't have agreement on what the outcomes of a college education should be or how to measure what students are able to do with their education as they enter careers and build their lives. We need to discuss what those things might be.

We also have to be concerned about the equity of outcomes, not just of inputs. The K-12 achievement gap affects who gets into college; it is also seen in college outcomes and eventually in the workforce. We have a large stake in erasing the gap at every level of education in order to increase social and economic mobility. How can the Master Plan better support that goal?

**Affordability and financing** are *the* key issues right now, but we agree with President Murphy—you should not reframe the Master Plan to meet a fiscal crisis.

College affordability is about more than fees alone, and California fees are still less than in many states. But the recent increases are a deeply disturbing signal of the dramatic shift from public support of public institutions to a private model where students, their families, and donors shoulder most of the cost. Are we moving toward privatization? Is that a direction we want to go?

If we want to preserve a public model that assures access regardless of socioeconomic status, then fee policy is important and it needs to be clarified and stabilized—but in the context of larger fiscal reform. And the importance of a robust financial aid system cannot be overstated.

We also need to explore how the institutions themselves demonstrate the worth of the taxpayers' investment and manage it in a cost-effective manner without compromising quality.

Finally, we must deal with the public's fundamental dislike of raising taxes or fees at the same time they want access to high quality public higher education. How do we persuade the public to reverse the last two decades' disinvestment in those institutions?

**Accountability** is important in higher education as well as K-12, and the public segments have expanded their performance measurements to address it. But internal performance assessment is not necessarily about meeting state goals.

We need to agree on more tangible state goals with measurable outcomes. We can't hold institutions accountable if they don't know what they are accountable for.

Also, we should rethink “accountability” more as a way to foster continuous improvement in higher education institutions than as a mechanism to punish them. It should also be a way to clarify funding needs and identify the tools the systems need to meet state goals.

Finally, **coordination and efficiency** can strengthen higher education, but its priority has been undercut. In that context, we hope you will explore how to strengthen CPEC’s role in promoting collaboration, articulation, and coordinated planning.

But coordination is about more than CPEC’s role. We need to keep chipping away at the silo walls between the systems. There *are* many efforts to reach across the boundaries and collaborate, and CPEC supports those. But collaboration, cooperation, and partnership—including partnership with the state—need to become a constant reality, even as we respect the segments’ unique missions.

We especially need to do more to reduce the distance between the P-12 system and higher education and create an effective P-20 continuum. I cannot over-emphasize how vital the link is between P-12 education (and we do mean *pre-school*-12) and postsecondary education.

What made the Master Plan great was not just that it promised access to any student who could benefit from higher education. It was the assurance that students would get an *excellent* education in any public institution they chose to enter—and that both they and the state would reap the benefits. In spite of great challenges, we have not yet lost what the Master Plan created. It is important now to consider how to recommit ourselves to it.

Finally, I want to bring you back to what I see as the key issue. In the legislature’s review of the Master Plan in the late 1980s, its authors, including President Murphy, articulated a “singular vision” for the future of the Master Plan (and I quote): “to enable California to become a fully multicultural democracy, in which persons of all races and ethnic origin have full opportunity, in which all are empowered to participate as equal citizens.”

The greatest value of the Master Plan is its vision to create a democracy in which every Californian has a place. That we must not ever lose.

We applaud this endeavor and look forward to helping in any way we can. Thank you.